

**Does Applying Ethics in Education Have an Effective Impact in the Classroom?**

**By Sam Eldakak**

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## ETHICAL ISSUES IN EDUCATION

### Abstract

Everyone believes now these days that our current age of technology where everything is available on the internet and through texts and emails, ethical issues and ethic in education are becoming major concern and very important than ever before. In the past, people needed to really work hard if they wished to obtain information for tests and other educational matters. Today, with a click of a button, one can easily obtain everything and more by generally cut and paste information without giving credit where credit is deserved. As Olson stated, “With a few clicks of the mouse, students simply can ‘cut and paste’ the information they need” (Olson, 2005, p. 17A).

While the majority of students may believe that it is okay to use some of the materials available in the internet without the proper citations and referencing, the role of ethics in education can play a moral and an effective role. This is the reason this paper was written to ensure that students must learn to be honest and not to commit such acts of plagiarism of any shape or form. With these points in mind, this paper displays a crucial points of the importance of ethics in the classroom.

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### **Ethics in THE CLASSROOM**

What is perhaps astounding is the fact that most students, and adults in the work world it seems, do not really think cheating or plagiarism is a serious issue. Consider the following:

According to Olson (2005), “In the latest survey of college students, 44 percent of those who said they had plagiarized dismissed the practice as ‘trivial’ or ‘not cheating at all.’” ““They convince themselves that they’re doing nothing wrong...That’s the scary thing, because that’s the attitude they’re going to take out into the real world”” (Olson, 2005; 17A). The student should stop and think about how they feel about the world outside of school, and the media that is uncovering liars and dishonest power figures. Merritt (2002) notes that, “College students are disturbed by recent corporate scandals: Some 84% believe the U.S. is having a business crisis, and 77% think CEOs should be held personally responsible for it” (Merritt, 2002, p. 8).

Clearly this is a very serious problem in our nation today and it seems that every single day someone is being found out for leaking information or being essentially corrupt. But, in all honesty the same thinking that goes into such corrupt behavior goes into cheating in school. So, while cheating on a simple term paper, or a research paper, through plagiarism, may seem like a little thing, it is just this sort of thinking that eventually involves itself in the workplace.

If a student is willing to take the written word of another person and claim it as their own what is to stop them from taking an idea of a coworker and claiming it as their own? Of course a student may think that they would never do that, but honestly they can gain ideas from coworkers and with the basic understanding that cheating is acceptable they may subconsciously take on those ideas as their own. Ethics takes serious focus and serious

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attention to detail. Ethics is not something that comes simply to people, but it is something that really must be thought carefully about, and then thought about once more. It is not always an easy thing to do, but it necessary.

In many ways ethics is something that is difficult to really grasp in terms of its importance and that is why it is difficult to adhere to. When asked why cheating is wrong most students may simply say that there is punishment attached. But, if there was no punishment attached why would cheating be wrong. What is wrong and what is right, one might ask.

The ethical point is that of harm. It is not a physical harm, but it is harm nonetheless. Cheating steals information from a person or people and takes claim of ownership. It is the simplest form of theft really, and even without punishment it can harm the thief. For example, let us imagine an individual who has felt pressured throughout their school years, struggling to make good grades because of the pressure. They occasionally turn to cheating to ease their stress. They still feel they know the information they should have learned, but in reality when they become an adult in the work place that pressure will only increase if they have not done their schooling on their own. If they have not truly learned the information they were taught, they will find themselves in a far more stressful position than they were in school and may well even lose their job. In the case of media figures we have seen of late, there could even be prison time involved.

Ethics protect everyone and make existence in a society more secure and safe. People can feel safer if they know that others are thinking about doing the right thing in all aspects of life. When an individual simply cheats, in whatever form they choose, they are breaking a sort of trust that all people require in a society. Does a student really want to live in a world where they can trust no one to be honest, or even care about being honest? While

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this may not matter to some people, for they are those who really do not care who gets harmed in the path of their success or survival, most of us would like to live in a world where we can trust one another and work together. That cannot happen without ethics, and an agreement upon what ethics are necessary, in our society.

One trend that is occurring in schools across the country is that which involves presenting copies of sources. This particular tutorial essay has requested copies of the sources used and the process of this is seen somewhat in the following:

“Require students to give you printouts of all their textual sources...Then, if you question whether students properly cited their sources, you can quickly find the relevant materials and determine if they were plagiarized” (Sterngold, 2004; 16).

Plagiarism is not a simple or easy thing to figure out at times. And, by providing sources in this manner a student can learn to better understand all the possible forms of plagiarism. For example, plagiarism is not just about copying down a source and not citing that source. Plagiarism can also be about quoting too much so that the entire paper becomes another author's, despite all the proper citation. This can often be avoided by paraphrasing, and citing, a particular source. In doing this the student also demonstrates that they understand the information.

This leads us to one of the most important aspects of cheating and ethics in school. Isn't it only expected that a student who is paying for an education, or whose parents are paying for an education, actually learn? The entire focus of education is learning and developing one's skills. If a student does nothing but hurry through school, copying from here and there so that it is not so stressful, they have not been educated at all. They have learned nothing but perhaps smatterings of information here and there.

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This also leads to those students who do not cheat and work really hard for their grade. If a classroom is graded on a curve and many students think cheating is all right, then where does that leave the student who has honestly worked hard to learn as much of the information as possible? People who work hard for their education are clearly hurt by those who cheat. And, when we understand the prevalence of cheating today where does that leave the value of a diploma? Professor Michael Bishop (2005), the Chair of the Iowa State University Department of Philosophy and Religion states that, "Cheating also cheapens the diploma. How valuable can a sheepskin be if so many people receive it under false pretenses?" In essence, when cheating is seen as much as it is being seen of late, a diploma ceases to make an impact for any employer and those who have struggled to gain their education are harmed in a very serious way (Bishop, 2005).

It becomes clear that cheating on a simple test or a simple essay is far more than simple cheating. Such thoughts, such attitudes, such beliefs, which argue that such cheating is not a big deal, eventually make their way into society and are outwardly manifested in leaks, corporate corruption, and the lies of an Administration. Do we honestly wish to live in a society where such behavior is accepted and seen as "not a big deal?" If such is the case we can perhaps look forward to a society where we are told we will be given a job for 10 years and a great retirement plan, only to find that it is acceptable that we are fired in six months and never given a reason. If such is the case we can readily see ourselves in a world where the President of the United States could perhaps promise everyone no taxes for self employment, then turn around and say "oops" and "but it was no big deal" they had lied. We rely on the basic foundations of ethics when it comes to being honest in our society and the more we ignore the need for such ethics the more they pervade our society in every aspect imaginable. In essence, if we do not appreciate being lied to in our daily lives, in our

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society, in our government, in our work then we should do everything we can to make sure we do not lie to others through cheating in our education.

### **Academic Integrity at Duke University**

In Promoting Academic Integrity at Duke University, its report of the University Academic Integrity Assessment Committee (2001) was presented to improve academic integrity on campus, In the spring of 1999 to participate in a pilot project on *Assessing Academic Integrity*. The project was made possible by a grant from the John Templeton Foundation and led by the Center for Academic Integrity, a national consortium of over 200 colleges and universities that is based here at Duke in affiliation with the Kenan Institute for Ethics.

According to the report, Duke University was one of the twelve colleges and universities selected to participate in the full pilot project and one of twenty schools that participated in the survey phase of the project. The principal investigator for the study is Professor Donald McCabe of Rutgers University, a nationally known researcher on student academic integrity. He has conducted surveys with tens of thousands of students over the past decade, including two previous surveys at Duke in 1990 and 1995. The committee's work consisted of two components:

- a) Conducting surveys of Duke Students, faculty and administrators.
- b) Evaluating Duke's academic integrity policies and procedures.

### **The Survey: Sample Size:**

During the 1999-2000 academic year, the committee invited 400 Duke students, 200 regular-rank faculty, 100 teaching assistants and 61 administrators. The rate response as follows:

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	<b>Students</b>	<b>Faculty</b>	<b>TA's</b>	<b>Administrators</b>
<b># of Surveys</b>	400	200	100	61
<b># of Respondents</b>	242	72	25	40
<b>Response Rate</b>	61%	36%	25%	66%

### **An Important Note about the Faculty Results**

We subsequently discovered that some of the faculty we surveyed did not teach undergraduates. We therefore report faculty data on the 32 respondents who we are confident teach undergraduates, based on their departmental affiliation and narrative comments.

### **The Evaluation Component: Looking at Policies and Procedures**

In addition, according to the Report of the Duke University Academic Integrity Assessment Committee (2001), the committee reviewed Duke's academic integrity policies and procedures through a series of discussions involving committee members as well as members of the Undergraduate Judicial Board, the Honor Council, academic deans, pre-major advisors, and the Appellate Board. The series of three meetings involved small group work in which participants used a set of questions developed by the Center for Academic Integrity to assess Duke's system for promoting academic integrity as well as the way in which the details of that system are communicated in publications. At the end of each meeting, the groups were assembled in order to report on findings and to share general impressions and anecdotal evidence about elements of the system that do or do not work well. The discussions focused on four main topics:

- (1) Policies
- (2) Disciplinary procedures and sanctions

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- (3) Readings on academic integrity
- (4) Overview of the survey results.

### Selected Student Survey Results

#### *Self-reported Cheating*

Question: Have you engaged in the following actions once or more than once since coming to

Duke?

	1 time	>1 times	Total
Unauthorized collaboration	22%	22%	45%
Copying a few sentences without footnoting them in a paper	23%	15%	38%
Falsifying lab or research data	19%	18%	37%
Getting questions or answers from someone who has already taken test	14%	9%	24%
Receiving substantial, unpermitted help on an assignment	10%	11%	21%
Fabricating or falsifying a bibliography	13%	6%	19%
Copying material, almost word for word, from any source and turning it in as your own work (Plagiarism)	4%	7%	11%
Copying from another student during a test/exam <i>without</i> their knowledge	7%	4%	11%
Copying another student's computer program	5%	5%	9%
Helping someone else cheat on a test	6%	2%	8%
Plagiarizing a paper in any way using the Internet as a source	3%	3%	6%
Cheating on a test in any other way	3%	4%	6%
Turning in work done by someone else	4%	1%	5%
Using unpermitted crib notes (or cheat sheet) during a test	2%	2%	4%
Copying from another student during a test/exam <i>with</i> their knowledge	2%	2%	4%
Writing or providing a paper for another student	2%	>1%	2%
Turning in a paper based on information obtained from a term paper 'mill' or website	2%	>1%	2%

Report of the Duke University Academic Integrity Assessment Committee Presented to the Arts & Sciences Council and the Engineering Faculty Council March 8, 2001

Question: Do you consider the following forms of cheating **serious** (as opposed to "trivial" or "not cheating")?

Copying from another student during a test/exam <i>with</i> their knowledge	85%
Copying from another student during a test/exam <i>without</i> their knowledge	83%
Writing or providing a paper for another student	79%
Copying a few sentences without footnoting them in a paper	77%
Turning in a paper based on information obtained from a term paper 'mill' or website	69%

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Getting questions or answers from someone who has already taken test	67%
Using unpermitted crib notes (or cheat sheet) during a test	51%
Turning in work done by someone else	44%
Copying another student's computer program	40%
Fabricating or falsifying a bibliography	38%
Falsifying lab or research data	28%
Receiving substantial, unpermitted help on an assignment	27%
Unauthorized collaboration	24%

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### Student Responses to Cheating By Other Students

Question: What would you do if you saw a student cheating on a major test or examination?

Report to instructor, proctor, or appropriate authority	18%
Ask student to report themselves and report if they fail to do so	15%
Express disapproval but not report	15%
Mention to other students without reporting	34%
Ignore the incident	14%
Other	5%

Question: Have you ever seen a student cheat during a test or exam at Duke?

Yes	64	27%
No	177	73%

Question: Have you ever reported another student for cheating?

Yes	1	2%
No	63	98%

### Perceptions of Duke's Policies:

Question: How would you rate the typical **student's understanding** of Duke's policies concerning

student cheating?

	Students	Faculty	TA's
Low/Very Low	62%	65%	32%
High/Very High	38%	45%	68%

Question: How would you rate the **faculty's understanding** of Duke's policies concerning student

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cheating?

	Students	Faculty	<i>Faculty</i>	TA's
Low/Very Low	22%	71%	57.5%	36%
High/Very High	78%	29%	42.5%	64%

Question: How would you rate the **faculty's support** for Duke's policies concerning students' cheating?

	Students	Faculty	<i>Faculty</i>	TA's
Low/Very Low	22%	45%	48%	54%
High/Very High	78%	55%	50%	46%

Question: How would you rate the **effectiveness** of Duke's policies concerning academic integrity?

	Students	Faculty	<i>Faculty</i>	TA's
Low/Very Low	50%	74%	59%	70%
High/Very High	50%	26%	41%	30%

Question: Duke's student judicial process is fair & impartial.

	Students	Faculty	<i>Faculty</i>	TA's
Agree/Agree Strongly	22%	34%	39%	16%
Not Sure	56%	58%	50%	76%
Disagree/Disagree Strongly	22%	8%	10%	8%

Question: Students should be held responsible for monitoring other students.

	Students	Faculty	TA's
Agree/Agree Strongly	43%	49%	44%
Not Sure	17%	16%	24%
Disagree/Disagree Strongly	40%	35%	16%

Question: How appropriate is Duke's standard sanction of a two-semester suspension for academic dishonesty?

	Students	Faculty	TA's
Appropriate	75%	77%	64%
Too Lenient	5%	18%	23%
Too Stringent	20%	5%	14%

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### Comparisons over Time: Duke Student Survey Results, 1990, 1995, 1999.

Question: Have you engaged in the following actions at least once since coming to Duke University?

	1990	1995	1999
Unauthorized collaboration	29%	42%	45%
Copying a few sentences without footnoting them in a paper	31%	46%	38%
Falsifying lab or research data	-	42%	37%
Getting questions or answers from someone who has already taken test	-	36%	24%
Receiving substantial, unpermitted help on an assignment	16%	23%	21%
Fabricating or falsifying a bibliography	21%	29%	19%
Copying material, almost word for word, from any source and turning it in as your own work (Plagiarism)	11%	16%	11%
Copying from another student during a test/exam <i>without</i> their knowledge	28%	19%	11%
Copying another student's computer program	-	20%	9%
Helping someone else cheat on a test	22%	16%	8%
Plagiarizing a paper in any way using the Internet as a source	-	-	6%
Cheating on a test in any other way	14%	11%	6%
Turning in work done by someone else	3%	7%	5%
Using unpermitted crib notes (or cheat sheet) during a test	21%	10%	4%
Copying from another student during a test/exam <i>with</i> their knowledge	13%	12%	4%
Writing or providing a paper for another student	-	3%	2%
Turning in a paper based on info. obtained from a term paper 'mill' or	-	-	2%

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### Selected Faculty Survey Results

#### *Efforts to Prevent Cheating and Promote Academic Integrity*

This chart compares Duke faculty responses from 1999-2000 and from 2001 with those from faculty at other schools in the 1999 survey group of 20 schools, divided into private schools with honor codes, public schools with honor codes, and schools with no honor code.

	Duke Faculty	Duke Faculty	Duke TA's	Private Honor Code	Public Honor Code	No Code
Change exams regularly	83%	24%	24%	72%	82%	79%
Discuss importance of integrity with students in class	45%	14%	28%	58%	59%	63%

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Remind students about their obligations/Duke policies	45%		16%	63%	47%	48%
Put information in syllabus about	28%	10%	28%	56%	61%	47%
Hand out different versions of an	28%	9%	24%	29%	42%	49%
Talk to students about your cheating detection methods	17%	4%	8%	13%	19%	27%

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### Responses to Cheating by Students

In the past two years, which of these actions have you taken in response to incidents of apparent cheating by a student?

	Faculty 1999-2000	Faculty 2001
Reprimanded a student	31%	30%
Lowered a student's grade	19%	27%
Referred case to appropriate authority	29%	16%
Referred case to department chair	14%	3%

Faculty members at Duke handle instances of student cheating in a uniform manner (2001)

<i>Disagree strongly</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Not Sure</i>	<i>Agree/Agree</i>
43%	16%	35%	5%

If you have referred a suspected case(s) of cheating at Duke, what was your level of satisfaction with the way the case(s) was handled? (2001)

<i>High/Very High</i>	<i>Low/Very Low</i>
61%	39%

### Major Finding

According to the report of the Duke University Academic Integrity Assessment Committee, presented to the Arts & Sciences Council and the Engineering Faculty Council March 8, 2001, the committee recognizes that survey results always require careful interpretation. A survey like this one, which asks student respondents to self-report

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unethical behavior, raises challenging questions about who responds and how honestly they respond. Such surveys tend to underreport than over report rates of cheating and plagiarism. (Duke University, 2001).

### **Recommendations**

As a result of the survey, several recommendations were taken into consideration to strengthen Duke's culture of academic integrity? It will require every campus constituency – faculty, students, and administrators – to accept a shared responsibility. Some of the recommendations, as follows:

#### (1) Building on a Young Honor Code

“Duke's Honor Code, passed in 1993, is very young. It is clear to the committee, not only from the survey results, but also from focus group discussions and informal conversations with a wide range of members of the Duke community, that Duke does not yet have a robust culture of academic integrity. The code is not a highly visible feature of campus life for students, faculty, or administrators. It is little discussed in Duke Classrooms and does not shape campus behavior in prominent ways as it does on some honor code campuses, where students take unproctored and even self-scheduled examinations. A student at one of our focus groups in the spring of 2000 vividly captured the situation. She pointed out that incoming students are required to sign the Code in the summer before their first semester along with paperwork regarding meal plans and housing, robbing the action of any symbolic weight or significance. This discussion inspired the Honor Council to organize a public Honor Code signing ceremony at Convocation in the Fall of 2000”.

#### (2) A Moment of Opportunity

Promoting a culture of academic integrity at Duke is a challenging task, but the university can draw on strong leadership in its efforts. The President, Provost, Deans of Arts and Sciences and Engineering, senior administrators in Trinity College and Student

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Affairs, and leaders among the faculty and student body have all demonstrated strong commitment on this issue.

Academic integrity is at the heart of the university's core enterprise of teaching, learning, and scholarship, and we all need to invest in the process of promoting academic integrity. A modest investment of time and attention can yield significant returns within our campus culture and in the lives of Duke Students. (Duke University, 2001).

### **Actions need to be taken:**

The committee recommends that Duke University take the following actions:

- (1) Create an Academic Integrity Council.
- (2) Mobilize faculty commitment and leadership.
- (3) Clarify Academic Integrity Statements and Documents.
- (4) Expand Efforts to Inform and Engage Students.
- (5) Inform Key Administrators and Staff.
- (6) Inform Parents, Alumni, and Trustees. (Duke University, 2001)

### Conclusion

Ethics should be a main concern when an educator is deciding how to teach and what he/she plans on teaching. On the other hand, student needs to develop her/his moral values and build a personal character. What is perhaps astounding is the fact that most students do not really think cheating or plagiarism is a serious issue. The ethical point here is harm. It is not a physical harm, but it is harm nonetheless. Cheating steals information from a person or people and takes claim of ownership. It is the simplest form of theft really, and even without punishment it can harm the thief. The entire focus of education is learning and developing one's skills. If students do nothing but hurry through school, copying from all sources to make their academic year less stressful, they will not be able to learn or educate themselves at all. In fact, they learn smatterings of information here and there.

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